



The Australian National University
Institute of the Arts



Canberra School of Art

GRADUATE DIPLOMA OF ART
1995

Richard Baldwin

REPORT
PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE
GRADUATE DIPLOMA OF ART

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank

Dr Jill Bennett, Dr David G. Hall and Gordon Hall for their supervision and help with writing this paper.

Wendy Leland and Inge Klemm for their help with the graphics program.

ABSTRACT

Research into the memory and effect of objects and environments recalled from childhood. The report outlines the studio practice which works towards an interpretation of an area around a marginalised town in the Australian landscape, Walgett. This process resulted in photographs and objects exhibited at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from March 16 to 25, 1995.

Marie Robson and Tony Robinson for their parents and understanding.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank-

Dr Jill Bennett, Dr David McNeil and Gordon Bull for their supervision and help with writing this project.

Nigel Lendon and Ingo Kleinert, convenors of the graduate program.

Martyn Jolly, supervisor in Photomedia and the staff of the Photomedia workshop.

Cathy Laudenbach, Barb Smith and the many students who provided critical feedback on my work.

Moira Nelson and Lily Baldwin for their patience and understanding.

Contents

Introduction	page 5
About Walgett	page 6
Details of Working Methods	page 6
Charred Wood	page 7
Illustration	page 7
Photogram Landscapes	page 7
Illustration	page 8
Objects in the Landscape	page 9
The Local Panorama	page 9
Illustration	page 9
The Object and the Image	page 10
Illustration	page 10
Field Trip To N-W N.S.W.	page 11
Glass on the River	page 13
Studio Practice - Aims and Objectives	page 14
Illustrations	page 15
A Second Field Trip	page 16
Collecting	page 16
Illustration	page 17
Studio Practice from November	page 18
Tea	page 18
Other Artists Work	page 19
Conclusion	page 20
Addenda	
Application	page 22
Curriculum Vitae	page 28
Bibliography	page 29

Introduction.

Study in the graduate diploma program has enabled me to focus on my studio practice for twelve months, providing me with an unusual degree of continuity in my work. The program has provided me with the opportunity to participate as a full-time student in the programs offered by the Canberra School of Art.

As the commitments to my teaching and my family increased during recent years, finding the time to practice art became more limited. So I saw my entry into the Graduate Diploma program as an opportunity to resolve some of my ideas, bringing them to a closure through a consistent program of studio practice.

The opportunity to work seriously in the landscape has come with this program of work. I had not used the landscape in my work since 1982. At that time I used the environment around Walgett as my subject matter. It was a long time ago.

Since that time I had maintained an interest in the work of artists in the A.C.T. region who had dealt with the landscape in one form or another. I felt that the most effective work in this genre maintained a critical distance from the landscape in order to better understand the changes that were taking place in the landscape.

My entry into the Graduate Diploma program encouraged me to make a change from working in the studio to work in the landscape. Although I was aware of many biographical events in and around Walgett, my feelings about the past were complex and difficult to identify.

I was aware of a certain character that had affected Walgett, and other towns like it, before proposing to undertake this project. During the 1960's and the 1970's the social, democratic and liberal changes that affected Australia had a profound effect upon Walgett. The influence of my memories of the rise in alcohol abuse and difficulties associated with agricultural land use can be seen in my studio practice.

I have used the report as a forum to better understand some of my own creative processes. Consequently I have written in the report about these processes that define my art practice. Expressive, impulsive and subjective are three words that can define my practice. I think about my work obsessively and constantly. As a result I hardly have time to finish a body of work before producing the ideas for the next. The only solution I have found is to produce more work.

About Walgett

In part, my proposal outlined my intention to return to Walgett, a small township of two and a half thousand people in the North Western Region

of New South Wales. My proposal came at a time of extreme environmental and social tension within the region.

This kind of tension was due partly to the drought that was causing hardship for the farmers and graziers and the shearers and shearing contractors who live in the township.

Walgett and the region surrounding it may be defined according to a set of cultural and economic relations which define isolated regions in the Australian outback. During the past 30 years the biggest and most visible changes have been the introduction of government agencies such as T.A.F.E. and aboriginal health facilities which have provided an attempt to solve some of the social problems in the township.

Social Welfare programs have to provide pensions over long periods of time and can ultimately damage the self esteem of the community. Unlike some other bush communities Walgett has not been able to establish a tourist industry that is hungry for its cultural products.

Recently in Walgett an abattoir has been established to export kangaroo meat. I was able to visit this business in which a number of old school mates worked. This recently established industry was providing kangaroo meat for local and international consumption. The work force in the abattoir was a reflection of the cultural diversity of the township, with a mixture of workers from Aboriginal and European backgrounds.

Drinking alcohol inside the township is a social factor that affects the landscape. The recent introduction of a prohibition on drinking inside the township has forced drinkers outside the township to the river bank.

Currently issues of land ownership are being debated in relation to the land tenure. This redefinition allows dispossessed groups of aboriginal people to regain control over parts of the Australian landscape. This is an important political and social redefinition of the land which may change the way we look at the landscape.

Working Methods

In my attempt to produce a resolved body of work for the Graduate Diploma program, I recognised two distinct goals in my studio practice of six months duration.

Initially, the exploration stage was designed to encourage divergent processes of thinking about the chosen theme of aura. The images that are the result of this process explore the relationship between objects found in the environment and the imagery that has been produced as a result. This method has allowed me to explore my initial proposal about the appropriate technical, theoretical and conceptual issues that have arisen in my studio practice in the first semester.

At times, I have been conscious of an almost cathartic need to act. To immediately produce a large number of images, to act on an idea and assess the results. At other times circumstances have directed me away

from my studio practice altogether to a point of total research. In the following component of this paper the studio practice exploration that occurred is documented in several different parts.

The analysis and comment, critical responses and alternative interpretations that are included here to describe my prior studio practice can be considered chronologically.

Charred Wood

I began to explore the possibilities of using the images of objects with landscape images. To explore the use of a found object I photographed a piece of burnt and charred wood. I photographed the charred timber in full sun which provided greater detail in the object as the lens has been opened up. The background began to effect the object in a way that simulated the landscape. The purpose of the work was to establish in my mind a sense of the relationship between the object and the landscape. The closer I came to this object the more it seemed to represent a part of the landscape.



charcoal

Photogram Landscapes

The photogram landscapes began as a form of experimentation, with the notion that an object and a landscape could be combined in the darkroom. To begin this body of work I collected a group of approximately 10 objects. I chose the objects for their optical qualities. For example I collected a piece of glass because of its transparency. I was able to print through the glass with a negative in the enlarger.

The negatives were shot and developed in 1993 using a box camera. The Brownie camera created a softly focused image, which may have indicated a particular aesthetic. I had originally photographed part of Black Mountain, near my home in Canberra. The images that I subsequently produced were part of my exploration into this type of camera.

The negatives have been under-exposed in the photogram, which allows for plenty of light to expose the objects on the surface. In other words, the difference between the soft background image and the sharpness of the

photogram had raised important formal issues, so that the photogram was in fact distracting the viewer from the landscape.

This work provided a solid basis from which I could continue to explore the relationship between the object and the image, in order to establish a greater unity between the components.

What the photogram demonstrates is that the photographic medium has always had a relationship with the object, as well as the image. When I began to explore the theory behind the photogram I wrote, "It seems to be appropriate that I explore the use of the photogram further because of its strong relationship to the object and its aura".



The glass has become an artefact that sits in the landscape.

Photographic artists such as Man Ray Tzara and Moholy Nagy seem to be aware of this connection between the object and the image in the photograph.

Maholy Nagy states --

"Reversing the habitual way of selecting photographic views for their black and white values, a new hidden world arises out of night scenes, setting in contrasts, growing with sublime magnificence a play of radiating light sources enveloping objects with an aura."¹

¹Baldwin Neil , "Man Ray" (1988), p 99.

Moholy Nagy positions aura very clearly in this statement, which suggests the establishment of profound relationships that emerge through "a play of radiating light".

March 1994 - Objects and the Landscape

It had been my intention to photograph the intrusions into the landscape around Walgett. The photographs taken during this period were intended to provide some basic information about the form of the intrusions.

Shooting this film provided me with some insight into the unusual nature of some of the intrusions that people make into the landscape. The attachment of a soft toy onto a tractor. The alien appearance of an emergency phone which has been repaired so badly that the construction takes on a bizarre quality.

Critically the images provoked some amazement. The objects which appeared to have no purpose, had in fact occurred without any intervention from the photographer. This led me to the possibility that unusual objects could be introduced to the landscape and photographed there.

I collected objects over one week from Revolve, a recycling depot in the A.C.T. The objects were generally chosen because their function had become unclear. The processes of use, and the ultimate discarding of the objects had rendered an abstraction to their form. At this point I was also interested in the object's surface pattern. The object's patina, as evidence of its age. When the objects were placed into position ready to be photographed, the "intrusion" became an important part of the image. The fence post with all of its evidence of ageing is as important as the objects placed onto the fence. Consequently, I became interested in the installation of the objects and the exploration of constructions in the landscape and photographed.

The Local Panorama

Richard Maurice's panoramic photographs of sheep and cattle yards (which were cited in my proposal) depict the early structures placed into the Australian Landscape by graziers, primitive constructions evoke a particular relationship with the landscape. I became interested in the nature of the structures that could be found in the landscape, which suggest a human presence. I began to explore this imagery by installing objects onto fences in the landscape around Canberra. The following image titled "Isolated Object" - was originally photographed in the A.C.T. region toward Captains Flat.

A cake tin has been placed onto a fence post, to suggest a human presence. I have seen this type of activity in remote areas of the Australian Landscape where an object is placed onto a structure, such as a mail box. It is an artistic process that creates a kind of reassurance for people in isolated areas. The construction may take on a life of its own as others add to it, or it may simply remind people that they are not alone.



Isolated Object

The Object And The Image

During April I began to photograph objects and forms in the landscape using a panoramic format camera. This was the first occasion that I had used this type of camera which seemed to provide an appropriate format for the landscape that I intended to photograph.



10 Kilometres from Captains Flat

A Widelux camera scans the landscape and as the shutter opens, a clock work mechanism rotates the lens. In my proposal, I had cited the panoramic format as a possibility for rendering the landscape. This particular camera produced some interesting results, which I believe developed my studio practice.

The location that I chose was approximately 10 kilometres from Canberra on the Captains Flat road. I chose this place because of the evidence of debris that had been dumped at the site. It had many of the attributes that I anticipated finding on the outskirts of Walgett.

In the photographic images produced at this time, I have either placed objects on the ground or against the fence. For example I installed a crushed metal can on the fence using wire. It was a primitive means of installing the object similar to that I had seen in the bush. The process which makes use of available materials helped me to establish a relationship with this part of the landscape.

At the Lake George site I was able to use objects that were found on site. A large white ball which had been a float was placed against the fence on the foreshore of the lake. I was able to formulate constructions which I photographed using the panoramic camera. At this stage of my studio practice I found processes in the installation and photography of the objects that would inform my work at a later date.

Also at this time I discovered a number of technical faults which changed the course of my studio practice. The Widelux camera was unable to produce an image containing continuous tone because of the age of the spring which drives the lens in the camera. The result was a photograph with a series of lines across the landscape. My response to this situation was to explore the possibilities of the 4'x5' camera.

The image titled 'flag', is part of a series which resulted from the use of the large format camera. I found the detail that the camera provided on the negative exciting. However the logistics involved in using it on a field trip to Walgett proved too difficult at this time. The processes of obtaining developing and printing images in this format, will enhance my studio practice in the future.



Flag

Field Trip North Western N.S.W.

My proposal to take photographs on the outside edge of Walgett were to be motivated by childhood memories of those areas. Childhood memories become vague with the passage of time, mixed with present expectations of what the past should be like. My recollections of the township had

begun to fade from 1987 the year that I ceased to live in the town. I had become curious about the nature of my memories of this town as it was not a place that I thought of often, however I was aware that it formed a significant part of my memory.

A 10-15 feet high bank of earth that forms a ring around the township of Walgett in order to protect it during periods of flood which occur on the Barwon and Namoi rivers. I spent quite a bit of time in the area between the banks and the rivers. The hills which were formed provided a perfect place as a child to ride a bike.

The North-Western region of N.S.W. is extremely flat. From Coonamble the nearest town 70 miles north to Walgett, the tar road joining the towns has very few bends. No hills or mountains can be seen between these two towns.

The tourist brochure calls Walgett the "gateway to the opal fields". It acknowledges the way in which tourists travel through to Lightning Ridge 45 miles to the North. It also seems to acknowledge peoples desire to pass through the town quickly.

I travelled to Walgett over a two day period by bus. Had I decided to travel to London I could probably have reached my destination sooner. In a sense the perceptual element of the aura was evoked in the travelling process, miles and miles of straight road which were mesmerising. The distance reminded me of the trips that I used to make home years ago.

A commitment to travel back to Walgett had been a difficult one for me to make, perhaps because I had left personal issues buried there. Going back to produce a body of photographic work seemed much more difficult than going back to visit a family member - the purpose of my last visit. I no longer have any family members in the town so that particular connection no longer existed.

The trip consisted of two long bus journeys. Six hours to Dubbo and five hours to Walgett. In the second stage of the journey, a familiar mixture of faces at the Dubbo bus stop began to appear.

Country towns seem to provide an intriguing combination of familiarity and distance. Local people are recognisable because of the small population of the township. Walgett has 2500 people in the township. They are close because of their proximity, not because they have chosen to become friends.

When I boarded the bus I found myself sitting next to a member of the Chape family. I remembered the name, which stirred some childhood memories for me. Although I could not recall meeting this man personally I was aware of his family, their occupations and some of their behaviour. I was classified by this person as "Peter's (my fathers) eldest son". In this sense, recognition becomes familial, rather than personal.

As the bus trip progressed we discussed a number of issues in our conversation. The township had become "*wilder*", that is the temperament of the town had changed due to alcohol consumption. We discussed the

man's insurance claims, (his leg had been broken in an alcohol related accident) shearing, cotton farming and the river which did not flow any more because of the increase in the number of cotton farmers.

At about 7:30 I arrived at the Two Rivers Caravan Park close to the Namoi River in Walgett. I didn't intend to make any social contact during my stay, although this may have removed some of the feelings of social discomfort as I arrived. Most of these feelings were related to being an outsider with no real purpose. To the locals, my intention for returning to the town would have appeared quite weird.

The next morning I woke up and walked over to the nearby levee bank to a place familiar to me. The area between the river and the levee bank was often used by local people for walking, fishing, push bike riding, drinking and smoking, lighting fires and grazing cattle.

The township of Walgett had been declared alcohol free. The signs posted around the town declare that people who consumed alcohol inside the town limits would be fined \$500. This is a recent phenomenon. As I walked around the river I was not only struck by its beauty. I was noticed a great deal of glass and debris that lined the river bank. I thought as I walked there was much more material on the river bank, compared to my last visit to the region. The next morning I walked into the township: it was my intention to photograph the spaces that had remained vacant. Walgett had a great many of these because the weak economy couldn't support any new building projects. In the end I did not take many photographs inside the town limits, as I felt this was an intrusion upon the community. Also I found that many of the sites presented memories to me that were not appropriate to my project.

During my walk along the main street on the Sunday morning an Aboriginal man recognised me and said hello. He was sitting on a bench with a mate. Our familiarity may have been because we both attended the local high school. Maybe it was because I was out on the street quite often as a child. Walgett is a small town and most people know each other.

The most prominent observations for me as we talked in the street were the cuts above the eyes of the two men. I found myself thinking of the glass along the river bank. Sadly the alcoholism in country towns gives rise to a great deal of violence amongst local people. The cuts were a part of this phenomenon.

Glass on the River

I found many of the objects that had been discarded on the bank compelling and beautiful. I found objects receding into the dark mud. I wondered what anthropologists would make of the debris in the future, discarded on the outside of the township, a record of social dislocation perhaps. Along the river it was totally still. Not a breath of wind moved along the water. As I took the photographs I felt as if I was intruding, walking into a place that was no longer mine.

On my return, I set about printing a set of triptychs to be presented at the mid-year review. The decision to use triptychs allowed me to resolve a number of issues that ran through my work. I had retained the panorama that I first cited in my proposal. At the time I noted that the panorama could be divided into three parts, suggesting different fragments of time.

To achieve this I engaged in an experimental process in which the photographic images that have been gathered from my field trips are proofed, cut and divided into individual images and combined on a sheet of paper to establish a mock-up.

Studio Practice - Aims and Objectives

During the period from August through to November I attempted to explore some of the possibilities for constructing meaning within the imagery I had produced. I decided to proof all of the films and explore the associations within the work.

In the example below you can see that I have collaged fragments from three locations. Lake George, the Namoi River in Walgett and in the centre image I have photographed a tin can that was left in my local park. Each of the spaces represent something of the edge of a society, like the edge represented by Stephen Willats, objects have been left in these spaces. The debris in a landscape seemed somehow outside of or away from the authorities. This attempt to collage this kind of imagery did not produce a formal resolution in my work.

But it did allow me to explore some of the more subjective associations which were to be critical at a later stage in the year: The debris in the images, the scattered nature of the material forms associations in the photographic triptych.



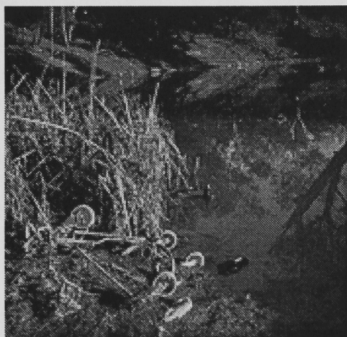
3 places

During the October period I began to make working prints to determine some of the choices that I needed to make in the production of my final body of work. In this way I was able to determine the contrast, paper types and other printing techniques that would be required for the final body of work. Also I could begin to determine which images I would use from the proofs that I had prepared.

In the image "*Shopping Trolley*" the use of the object is subverted because the shopping trolley has become embedded in the mud. The image was printed to its full scale of 50 cm x 50 cm, during August. I began to reduce

and to edit the images that I produced based on their capacity to engage my attention, those subjective process associated with the aura of the art work.

At about this time I also began to explore some of the possibilities of using objects and images together in an installation. I combined what I believed were the two most engaging photographic images with a ladder. Because the ladder was originally designed to lean against the wall it could be installed close to the surface of the wall. The ladder was installed length ways, which provided a series of segments that provided a space in which the talismans where placed. I used the ladder with an image "*Two Bottles*", which I found the most engaging at this time.



Shopping Trolley



Two Bottles

"*Two Bottles*" actually contained four bottles because the same part of the landscape was photographed twice from slightly different angles. This quasi-stereoscopic view of the landscape became the basis for further exploration of the auratic landscape. For the first time I used an object, a ladder placed between the photographs.

At this time Julian Dashper was invited to participate in a tutorial in the Photomedia workshop. Julian is an artist, based in New Zealand who selects objects which critique the museum. He installs them into the gallery space. Julian criticised the installation of the ladder, by arguing

that I was almost as if I was working in two styles at the same time. When I considered his response to my work I found his remarks fascinating as he discussed the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in the art work. In this space the artist may move between the object and the image.

He maintained the work could be further resolved. He proposed further exploration of the installation of the ladder into the space. It was an acute form of criticism which recognised both a subjectivity and objectivity in my work. Defining the work in terms of either subjectivity or objectivity could also be problematic. Could aura be both subjective and objective; as if it is occupying a space between Surrealism and Realism ?².

The outcome of this critique defined my ideas in relation to my studio practice, indicating to me that the photographic images of the two bottles were subjectively engaging. But the objects needed further exploration to bring their reading closer together, to find an ambiguous space in which subjectivity and objectivity mingle.

A second field trip

During September I began to make preparations for a second field trip to Walgett. Unlike the first field trip I organised a car for this excursion.

The Far Western region of N.S.W. and the South West region of Queensland had been in the news because of the drought. The federal government was beginning to provide some assistance for the farmers and graziers of the region. Economics and the weather define the landscape around Walgett. The lack of water in the drought or the abundance of water during the periods of flood had defined my memories of the town.

When I drove to Walgett in September the landscape was clearly drought stricken, the grass had given way to dust. The landscape had become a yellow grey colour and the ground cover had died, giving way to black soil.

The exploration of the theme that I had undertaken in the landscape around Canberra, helped me to plan this second field trip. Earlier in the year I had chosen objects from a recycling depot and taken them to be photographed near Braidwood.

The results from this body of work encouraged me to gather a number of objects for installation in the landscape around Walgett. I felt that the rivers were critical in the location of these objects that I called "talismans" because of their partly figurative form. The construction that was formed in that part of the landscape in which it was photographed, seemed to fulfil the same function as a "talisman" in other contexts.

²Further discussion of this line of thought can be located in my research paper, p28.

Collecting

After arriving in Walgett, I began the process by simply walking upon the banks of the Namoi river, picking up objects and returning to the Caravan Park where I was staying. There were lots of objects to be collected. A piece of linen, stained and rotten, glass and pieces from dead cars.

Various pieces of material were collected at this time and formed the basis of the talismans. When the objects were photographed I was also able to use other material collected in the immediate area on the river banks. Some of this material can be seen in the background of my photographic compositions. In a way the landscape and the materials became integrated.

A second strategy in my studio practice was realised by collecting objects from Walgett and installing them in the gallery. I found some groups of oxidised bolts underneath each of the bridges near the township. They had been used in the construction of the timber bridges over the rivers. The bolts had developed an enigmatic quality because they had been submerged in the muddy waters of the rivers. As the river level had subsided the bolts reappeared.

The metal in the bolts was extremely corroded and coated with mud. This process of dematerialisation began to produce a sense of aura so I gathered these objects for later use. I also found a number of broken bottle necks, which I collected. The bottle necks could be inverted and placed over the bolt in such a way that the bolt was simply and directly transformed.



A "talisman"

Studio Practice from November

During November I began to print the photographic images from the field trips which were to form the basis of my final body of work. I had decided that the images should be about 45 cm x 45 cm .

This decision would allow the content and the grain of the photographs to work together.

Using a range of smaller working prints for reference I began to print the images from the field trips in the larger formats. I made a series of formal and technical decisions at this stage. On completion of this printing I had two sets from each of the field trips. The first series numbered eight and the second series numbered twelve prints.

Tea

Earlier in the year I had experimented with the process of organically staining the photographic images in a tea solution. The results had been pleasing as the tea produced an effect which suggested an aged print. The tea suggested that the paper itself was old because it had been stained with an organic process rather than chemically toned. In the past, I had used sepia tone which attacks the emulsion. However I chose the tea because it produced an ambiguous result which was closer to a golden colour than sepia.

The choice to use this process was rather a challenge because of the dramatic effect that the staining had on the black and white print. I was reminded of the emotional responses to the cleaning of some Renaissance art works, which created a kind of shock when it was cleaned and the fluorescent colours of the work were revealed.

The process of staining the prints with tea was the opposite. A kind of shock was produced amongst those who had seen the images prior to the staining. The bleached whites of the black and white photographs were made into a sepia which was reminiscent of bromide photographic papers. It changed them dramatically, engaging the images more directly with the landscape but at the same time removing them from a position in the context of black and white photography. I believe that the use of tea to stain the print is consistent with the theme of the aura. The prints look like bromides, images from the past recollected and placed into a new context.

Also the staining established a kind of realism as the yellow-grey of the images resembles the colour of the landscape around Walgett.

The combination of tea and the emulsion of the print, has reproduced the limited colour range of the drought stricken area of North-Western N.S.W. Staining the black and white photographs has also rendered photographic images as subjective historical images, as the colour of the print now appears to be aged - retrieved from the archives of a museum, or from the attic of a building perhaps. The images are representations of the locations from my past. It is consistent with the process of visiting such a location that memories are retrieved illogically, in an auratic way, forming a

kind of collage of the present and the past, so that the objects that have been retrieved may be included into my history.

During the final three months I have explored a number of possibilities to assist in the presentation of this work. Initially I had been inclined to frame the photographs without a matt. However after cutting and mounting an example, I felt the authority provided by this process would provide a more powerful statement. Subsequently I cut a number of different cardboard mats which I have placed in front of the images. During this process I have rejected the deeper sepia tones of mount board and selected an ivory toned board.

Since that time I have been exploring the effects that different timbers and widths of timber would have upon the images. The framing of the images is important, so I have explored the use of oxides which can be applied as iron filings and vinegar to an ash frame to produce a blue-grey finish. At this stage I have chosen a solution of Tar-Paint and turps that produces a deep sepia finish.

Other artists' work

During the past twelve months I have examined other artists' work. I have examined the relationship between Primitivism and Surrealism. The Surrealists detected correspondences in many things, but perhaps most of all in tribal objects, especially from Oceania and the Pacific North West coast, which they sometimes considered in the auratic terms of the reciprocal gaze. "New Hebrides sculpture is true", Giacometti once remarked, "and more than true, because it has a gaze". Levi-Strauss wrote about a favourite haunt of Surrealist emigres during the war, the North West Coast Wing of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The European Surrealists found a human relationship within the auratic objects which returned their gaze.

This primitive cultural form of engagement between the object and the viewer is written into Australian Surrealism between 1937-47 in the work of painters such as Nolan, Gleeson, Tucker and Boyd. Particularly Tucker's "Images of Modern Evil", Drysdales work on the Australian landscape in drought, "My Australia" a series of photographs published by Hal Missingham and Sidney Nolans "Kelly" series, have come to my attention because of the nature of my work.

Hal Foster³ argues that the experience of the surrealist artist's encounter with ethnographic art was a direct and literal experience. The significance of this theory is that it is possible to establish a sense of direct crisis in the viewer through the engagement of the viewer's attention.

In his essay titled Painted Faces⁴ Alphonso Lingis' writes about the link between the theories of Satre, Levi-Strauss and the Freudian notion of Oedipal fear/fantasy. In this context is the idea of duality that Levi -Stauss discovered in the tattoos of the Cadiveo Indians. Whose faces were

³Foster Hal, "Compulsive Beauty" (1993), p.201

⁴Lingis Alphonso, Art and Text, no 27, p 81-92, 1988

tattooed with mirrored motifs. Lingis associates the idea of duality with the Oedipal crisis, the "Mirror Phase". It is a complex thesis that is based on the argument that western psychology can be analysed in context with the motifs of indigenous people.

I have used this motif in my photographic work because of its association with the theory of the aura that embodies the mirror phase of Freud and Lacan.

Also of interest for me was the relationship between the doll and trauma in the work of Michael Nedjar. Nedjar responded to a combination of complex traumatic ideas and journeys that established an engaging mix of magic archetype and trauma. Nedjar has established a pattern of behaviour that dissolves the effect of distance on auratic experience as it was written about by Benjamin⁵.

Conclusion

During the past twelve months I have been able to identify a number of critically important elements of my studio practice. One of these processes is my tendency and need to work through a number of visual and conceptual models prior to resolving the work.

In the past I have always thought that the process of producing many ideas, a diverse range of visual solutions, is a strong way of thinking about practicing art. In fact I spent the first six months of my program engaged in a program of divergent thinking.

Although I do not wish to argue that divergent thinking is more important than convergent thinking I recognise the value that becoming focused on my studio practice. In particular my focus on installing an object in the landscape has created many more possibilities through the process of resolution.

During the past twelve months my teachers and my peers have provided me with criticism that has reminded me of the subjective processes that can enrich one's studio practice. This form of practice seems immune to the processes of planning, yet it is enhanced by regular art practice.

The combination of studio practice and the writing of this report and thesis made this a very challenging course. At times I found the writing processes and the subjective image making processes incompatible. I found it necessary to remove myself from some of the ideas in order to produce a visual response to those concepts.

The word that I have used to describe the objects placed into the landscape is Talisman. It is defined as a small cult like object that is inscribed with images of human faces or forms. I have used the word in the widest possible sense to describe the objects that I have been making. My intention has been to explore the possibility of a presence in the landscape by assembling the objects from the locations that I visited.

⁵This line of thought is explored in my research paper.

One of the interesting outcomes from this process has been the collection of associations that has occurred. As I have attempted to work in a more intuitive way many of the verbal associations that I have made with my work have decreased. Instead, I have been left with an odd collection of visual associations that range from the drought (particularly the yellow-grey colour), to the similarity between an aura and the reflections of the cloud in the water of the Namoi River.

This project has provided me with the first opportunity to explore the use of materials and objects in my work. I found a direct relationship between the object and the landscape. A kind of dialectic can be established with an object, a philosophical truth which transcends the intervention by the artist. On the other hand, the photographic representation of the landscape enables other qualities, such as the poetry of the river and the materials found there to be evoked. Although the intervention is obvious to me, I have been surprised when people wonder if the objects have been found or made.

The drought seems to have broken now so the colour of the landscape will have changed. The objects on the bed of the river will have disappeared under water.

Addendum

Study Program

I am proposing to produce 10 large format black and white photographic images and 10 installation pieces that depict the Aura sensation in relation to issues of my identity and background.

Background

During 1983-4 I projected graphic light patterns on to my body which were re-photographed to produce a 'self portrait'. I used these images to document a Petit Mal seizure that is created when I encounter any flashing light. I used the blurred movement that occurred due to the slow shutter speeds as a metaphor to depict the change in my consciousness. Some years later the Sydney Morning Herald published a photograph of Dr. Bill Lovegrove whose research suggests that up to 40% of the population may be disturbed by this type of imagery.

In 1984 I was able to take the documentary process one step further using performance art. In this medium, by using a strobe light I created an epileptic fit. My unconscious actions were recorded. This was a challenging work for me and for those who saw it. This event was only performed once as a Grand Mal epileptic fit causes minor brain damage. This performance marks the end of the documentary style that I had been using in my work perhaps because the unconscious nature of the epileptic fit had become apparent.

I began to explore the notion of Epilepsy as a myth in the context of art history. Epilepsy is part of the myth that surrounds Van Gogh the archetypal mad artist. I was interested in the role that Epilepsy played in creating that myth. Historically, Epilepsy has been mythologised - demons enter the body, Christians exorcise the demons. My response was to make a photographic installation - I used four large photographs that were mounted onto board and placed at different levels close to the ground. Candles were placed on the surface of the photographs to create an enigmatic light source. The installation was called "A Simple Act of Madness" as the text that had been recorded and used the letters between Van Gogh and his brother. What interested me was the artist's state of mind.

In 1986 I exhibited 10 photographs in an group exhibition entitled from State to Statement at Gallery One in Stanmore. This series of black and white photographs were based on a children's story. The images were made by rephotographing line drawings that had been projected. A line drawing of a figure bathing had been projected and rephotographed in a bathroom. The text of the story was not provided (in full) to the viewer. However parts of the text were used in the titles. My intention was that a new narrative would be created by those who viewed the works. I was interested in exploring the use of the narrative in my photographic work and split the reality of the photographic image.

Each projected image acted as a metaphor for me a self portrait in light projected onto a photographic reality. With this body of work I began to explore my identity as a fiction which became split, broken down and re-united with the viewer into a new narrative. This notion arose out of the body of work entitled "A Simple Act of Madness".

The identity of an artist slips. It moves and changes as history is constantly re written. For me the image of a hairy man in the bath remains the strongest. It embodies the concerns that I have outlined above. Each of the images is fragmented, only a group of different self portraits can engender a true picture of a person's identity.

The process of making visual images has been closely associated with structures from literature in my work. In 1988 I produced a body of work that explored the relationship between logic, image and text. This body of work used simple phrases written in a prose form. 'The Moose and The Goose' is one such example. I projected a slide that included one phrase from the prose. Each slide was projected and rephotographed. In the first image the text illustrated the image. In the image of the trip-dyke the text rhymed but the image was unrelated. In the third photograph the text and the image were unrelated.

In the Exhibition titled The Cup, The Cloud, The Vase and her Flower I have used the allegory as a structure for my imagery. The allegory is a form that represents the narrative.

For me this is a complex body of work. The issues that I have addressed may have benefited from a wider critical input in the earlier part of the production. The works are quite small and the intense colour of the Cibachrome print is intended to resemble a small oil painting a small precious art object. I have explored the relationship between scale and the preciousness that exists for (some) works of art. Further more I wanted to encourage the viewer to approach the artwork. To create an intimate space between themselves and the work. The allegory of The Cup The Cloud The Vase and her Flower is repeated to suggest a narrative between the objects. The title of the exhibition used the female gender for a number of reasons. It is a reference to the intimacy of the work. And to the association between gender and scale. The images themselves are an allegory for my identity that has been broken down into two sets of four parts. Its a story of consciousness that occurs at the onset of the Grand Mal seizure .The cloud for example represents the Aura sensation.

Studio Practice

For the studio practice component of my Graduate Diploma I am proposing to make a body of work that addresses the concept of the aura in relation to the small townships of The Far Western region of N.S.W. and my lifelong association with that region. I am particularly interested in the townships that do not really possess an identity, except perhaps to those people who live in the town. This change is also due to my recent research into the relationship between the object its aura and reality.

I envisage photographing the outside edge, the borders of the townships such as Walgett and Lightning Ridge and collecting objects from the edge of the towns. "Stephen Willets - Pat Turdy and the Glue Sniffers Camp" creates a dialogue between the objective truth of the glue tin (that is presented as if it were evidence) and the subjective truth of the photograph. I am interested in that these objects retain a sense of their aura.

The images that I intent to produce will establish the concept of the aura on the following levels;

that a connection exists between patterns of light or patterns of energy and the aura of the object. That an object can imbued with aura with the radiating patterns that occur in nature.

That I introduce an object because of its surface pattern and its social history. Tin is a good example because of its use of a building material in a section of Walgett that came to be called "Tin Town"

That the Far Western Region is an agricultural region and can be identified with a set of objects that construct a dialogue with what I perceive as the identity of the region.

I am proposing to make 10 installations made from timber, photographs and objects. The installations shall be presented on the wall of the gallery. They will comprise objects and photographic images. The objects will be presented in a rectangular box similar in its format to a panoramic photograph. I envisage the construction as having a panoramic format in order to retain a sense of the landscape from which it came.

Also I am proposing to research the photography of Richard Maurice in the outback at the turn of the century. An example of the photography of the period is "Sturt Creek - Sheep and Cattle Yards". It is an unusual image that uses the panoramic format and represents the early intrusion into the landscape. Maurice photographed a sheep and cattle yard that uses uncut timber. The value of this image is in the social and cultural associations of the object in the photograph.

Janet Laurence in her installation titled "Forensic" (1991) provides an interesting framework because of the combination of photographs and natural materials in the work. I am interested in using her work as a starting point for visual research because of the effective way she embodies her philosophical and personal concerns. I expect that the choices that I make with this body of work will be influenced by the social problems of the townships.

The critical component of my Studio practice is important. As the opportunities for meaningful debate about my work have been rare. It is important to engage in this process in the right frame of mind. I must establish my ideas without being inflexible. I should look at the responses that I gain to provide critical guidelines for use in the longer term.

Research Paper

I am proposing to research the notion of the aura. I wish to explore the question of social construction of the aura and its relationship to what Walter Benjamin calls the patina of the art objects. Is the material captured

in the photographic image held in place by the alteration on the surface of the object, its patina or by its place in history?

Benjamin defines the aura as the phenomenon of distance. He illustrates this notion by describing the branch of a tree which casts a shadow over a person. This is also the tension that exists between the cult value and the exhibition value of the image.

The Approved Study Program - Work Proposal

For the studio practice component of my Graduate Diploma I proposed to make a body of work that explores the notion that some objects are imbued with an aura. I wanted to explore the relationship between the aura and the identity of the place from which the object came. Consequently the aura of the place is to be a part of the visual image.

Part of my proposal was to visit the small townships of the Far Western Region of N.S.W. or townships that have a similar quality to them. I have chosen this region because of my lifelong association with it and I am particularly interested in the relationship between a township's identity and its (self) esteem. To begin to explore this notion I am proposing to produce work that will deal with the aura of the found object, the various communities identity (or lack of identity), my own memories of the places, and the colonial intrusion into the landscape.

I envisage photographing the outside edge, the borders or the marginal areas of the townships similar to Walgett and Lightning Ridge. and collecting objects from public spaces inside the towns. These places will be chosen by me according to what I perceive from a personal point of view.

My personal experience with the aura sensation will remain as a criteria for the metaphorical and aesthetic choices that I make. Consequentially I am interested in the slippage between the aura in the 'cultural' sense as Benjamin discusses it, and the 'neurological' sense of the epileptic's experience.

My recent research has been focused on the notion of the development of an aura around an object of cultural significance. My research indicates a link exists, so that the greater the distance from an object the more pronounced its aura will be. Also an (art) object's aura is enhanced by its (perceived) originality. The position of an object in history is affected by these issues particularly if we accept that the processes of invasion and settlement pluralised notions of history are constantly being developed. Because of these ideas I wish to explore the dialectics that exist between the various fragments of objects and images. This is of course the same methodology as that used by the archaeologist or anthropologist.

Research

I wish to conduct my research by going out into the landscape gathering relevant material and returning to the workshop. This material will take to forms, the image and objects collected from the landscape.

Initially I intend to gather this material locally. This will allow me to explore appropriate aesthetic criteria which can be employed to gather material from the north west of the state later in the year. In the early stages I intend to use my memory of the character of the north west region of the state to help me make choices of what material to gather.

Working Methods

During the break in the Mid-Semester I intend to travel to the North-West of the state to gather material for my work. I anticipate a change will take place in my work as I return with this material. As it is manipulated, images are developed and found objects are installed, the effect of thesis trip may alter the nature of my work. It has been about 8 years since my last visit to Walgett. I expect some discontinuity to emerge between that work undertaken in the workshop and the material that I return with from my expedition.

The trip is intended as a method of recognising and photographing particular sites that retain an auratic quality. How can I establish this? Many sites within the landscape that are recognised by the archaeologist, the detective, the opal miner or the explorer employ a sense of intuition. I have in mind a number of sites that I have chosen because of the personal and historical associations. These are sites embedded with meaning because of these associations.

Working Processes

I am negotiating to use a panoramic camera. Hiring or buying a landscape camera is expensive. It may be necessary to consider cheaper alternatives to this. Other anticipated costs are petrol and accommodation

- At this stage I am proposing to use dark rooms 4 and 5 to produce;
- [1] 10x 8 x 10 prints - using Black and White 35 mm film
I recognise that the experience of travelling to Walgett may analyse and response.
- [2] 10x 8 x 10 prints - using Black and White 35 mm film
analysis and response.
- [3] Outcome - go to a larger format or reconsider the content
- [4] Are the intentions of my proposal being significantly addressed by the images being produced at this stage? At this point of time I wish to analyse the use of the image and the object in my work.
A possible response; Use objects and materials that have been collected to produce some assemblages. To do this I will need a space in which to use non-photographic materials

Timeframe 19/3/94 - 21/3/94

I envisage travelling into south western N.S.W. to photograph some of the small towns in the region. The purpose of the visit is to visit a group of towns of a similar size to Walgett. To explore the generic or universal qualities that exist in the townships.

1/4/94 - 4/4/94

At this time I am proposing to travel into north western N.S.W. The purpose of this expedition is to explore the concept of with a particular reference to certain sites as determined by my research.

23/4/94 - 25/4/94

At this time I am proposing to travel into Northern and North Western N.S.W. The purpose of this expedition is to explore the concept of with a particular reference to certain sites as determined by my research.

25/4/94 - 20/6/94

Within this time frame I intend to assess visual material from field trips select photographic images that fill the theoretical and visual criteria outlined in my rationale, print the photographic material contract and fabricate found objects.

Semester 2 : 25/7/94 - 16/9/95 26/9/94- 18/11/94

Response to mid-year review;

1/ Field trip into the landscape, to photograph and collect material from the small towns in the landscape.

2/ Begin printing full scale black and white prints, during the semester break. The scale of these prints will depend on the nature of the visual material collected during semester 1.

Curriculum Vitae

Richard Baldwin

Born 1962, Walgett, New South Wales

Education

1989 Graduate Diploma of Education
Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga

1981-1984
Bachelor of Arts (Visual).
Canberra Institute of Arts, A.N.U.

Group Exhibitions

- 1987 The Opening Show
Twilight Zone Gallery,
Byron Bay Community Centre.
- 1986 From State to Statement,
Gallery One, Stanmore N.S.W.
- 1984 A New Spirit In China Painting,
Bitumen River Gallery, A.C.T.
- 1983 If It Fits,
Bitumen River Gallery, A.C.T.
- 1982 New Faces,
Bitumen River Gallery, A.C.T.

Solo Exhibitions

- 1991 The Cup, The Cloud, The Vase, and Her Flowers
Photospace Gallery, Canberra Institute of the Arts
Artistry Gallery, Sydney.

Collections

Phillip Morris Arts Grant,
National Gallery of Australia.

Publications

The Bulletin, Picture Essay, 16th August 1994.
Gary Raffael, The symbolic becomes real,
The Canberra Times, September 1983.

Awards

- 1989 The Byron Bay Community Arts Centre, Easter
Arts Festival Award.

Bibliography

Baldwin, Neil

Man Ray, Penguin, London, (1988).

Benjamin, Walter

Illuminations,

H Arendt (ED) Cape, London, (1970).

Bond, Anthony D

The Boundary Rider,

Biennale of Sydney,

Harper Collins, Sydney, (1992).

Foster, Hal

Compulsive Beauty

M.I.T press USA, (1992).

Trachtenberg, Alan

Classic Essays on Photography

Leete's Island Books, (1987).

New Haven, Connecticut

Weaver, Mike

History of Photography

Taylor And Francis London, (1992).

VOL 16 NO.4 Winter 1992

Weiss, Allan S.

Art and Text 27

Art and Text, Sydney, (1988).

Willis, Anne Marie.

Picturing Australia

Angus and Robertson, (1988).